

"This exploitation was the first case that involved more than just a minor theft from an elderly person," Alexander said. "We have a lot of scam calls and people falling for stuff, but this was the first time I realized that someone had lost \$13,000.

"It took my heart and soul ... and I felt so sorry for the family that they had been taken," he continued. "It was a challenge to see if I could [work the case] because it was new to me and because of who it was. I wanted to succeed, and I think I did with the help of the detective in South Carolina and our KSP here."

Though this was a new type of potential scam for the Cadiz Police Department, the idea of scams targeting the town's large elderly population was not new. Everyday, in towns and communities across the commonwealth, elderly individuals are preyed upon by smooth-talking, illegitimate contractors, promising sweepstakes scams, or persuasive phone calls soliciting money.

There are a plethora of scams out there that are set up to look like sweepstakes. For an older population who may be on fixed incomes and looking for any way to supplement their incomes, they are an

There are a plethora of scams out there that are set up to look like sweepstakes. For an older population who may be on fixed incomes and looking for any way to supplement their incomes, they are an easy target.

easy target. Some of these come through the mail like Publisher's Clearinghouse-type solicitations. Others are received as phone calls with predators asking for money for anything from supporting local law enforcement to helping get their grandchild out of jail in Mexico. One of the most popular scams recently is scam artists out of Jamaica telling the person they have won a large sum of money, but first they have to cash a check and send back a portion of the money for handling fees.

"People think, 'Who would be silly enough to fall for these?'" Thornsberry said. "But, they are targeting people who may not be in the right frame of mind anymore. Once they know they have someone like that, they don't stop at \$500, they keep going. The scam will morph into almost a personal relationship. We've had victims who have almost lost \$100,000."

In the summers, many agencies see a rise in contractor scams on the elderly. Contractors will come to the door and point out deficiencies in the person's home, such as a driveway needing to be sealed or shingles that have blown off a roof, and offer a low price to fix those things immediately.

"That's a challenge with the elderly because they cannot get up on the roof and see if the roof is bad or not," Benton Police Chief Tracy Watwood said. "The [contractor] will intimidate them to the point that they will say fix it, or seal the

driveway because they don't want their home destroyed."

These so-called companies are fly-by-night operations that move into and out of town quickly and rarely stay long enough to get caught, only long enough to make some money, Watwood said.

As an answer to many of these scams that seem to be reoccurring frequently, with slightly differing details, many law enforcement agencies across the state use local newspapers and radio stations to get out the message to their elderly populations. They will tell what scams they have seen and warn them not to fall for them, and to notify the police if they believe they have been targeted by a scam.

"The message we try to get out to our senior citizens is, 'You are not bothering us — call the police department, that's what we are here for,'" Watwood said. "We can't help if you don't contact us.' So we have to educate them and allow them to educate us so we can meet in the middle. That helps us do our job and helps them feel better protected."

With continued education about the potential scam dangers that exist and putting in the work to build trust in their communities, law enforcement agencies across the state are working hard to keep the senior citizens in their communities from being victimized, ripped off and left with only a shred of the financial security they once built for themselves.

"I just remind them that anyone can be a victim," Watwood said. "Just don't make yourself an easy victim. Try to protect yourself and your property the best you can."

Abbie Darst can be reached at abbie.darst@ky.gov or (859) 622-6453.

◀ Cadiz Police Chief Hollis Alexander looks over case files with Mr. Andrew Thomas who was financially exploited by a con-woman who stole nearly \$13,000 from him. This was the largest exploitation case Alexander has worked in his 16 years as Cadiz chief.

PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

